

FIRST RECORD OF *PETRELAEA TOMBUGENSIS* (RÖBER) (LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE) FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

Petrelaea tombugensis (Röber, [1886]) is recorded from Western Australia for the first time in the northern Kimberley. Adults were recorded in riparian evergreen monsoon vine forest during May 2015. This new location, together with previous records from the ‘Top End’, NT and Cape York Peninsula, Qld, suggest the species is distributed widely but sporadically throughout the Australian monsoon tropics.

The lycaenid butterfly *Petrelaea tombugensis* (Röber, [1886]) has a sporadic distribution within Australia. It was first recorded from the Australian mainland only as recently as 1977, in northeastern Queensland near Iron Range (McEvey 1977). It has since been recorded at a few other locations, including Cobourg Peninsula, NT (Common and Waterhouse 1981), Torres Strait (Müller *et al.* 1998), Lockerbie on Cape York Peninsula (Braby 2000), and the Wet Tropics between Cairns and El Arish (Müller *et al.* 1998), Queensland. Adults have mainly been recorded in monsoon vine thicket or lowland rainforest in riparian areas where they are believed to breed on *Terminalia* spp. with which they are strongly associated (Müller *et al.* 1998, Braby 2000). The butterfly appears to be highly seasonal in its timing of appearance.

In northwestern Australia, *P. tombugensis* is considered to be rare, known previously only from two specimens (both males) collected from Black Point on Cobourg Peninsula in the ‘Top End’ of the Northern Territory, on 26-27 January 1977 by E.D. Edwards (specimens examined in the Australian National Insect Collection, Canberra). On 19 May 2015, I collected six specimens (2 males, 4 females) of *P. tombugensis* from the Carson River crossing on the Kalumburu Rd, approximately 18 km SSE of Kalumburu, Western Australia (14.45277°S, 126.66373°E). They were associated with riparian evergreen monsoon vine forest and were either flying around vegetation 2-4 m above the ground or puddling from moist sand along the edge of a stream. The specimens were all in relatively good condition, according to the extent of wing wear, and had probably emerged shortly before their capture.

The new location from the northern Kimberley in Western Australia extends the range of this species 700 km southwest from its former western limit in the Northern Territory. This new location, together with previous records from the ‘Top End’ and Cape York Peninsula (and elsewhere in northeastern Qld), suggest that *P. tombugensis* is distributed widely throughout the monsoon tropics of northern Australia. Presumably, its apparent rarity is a

consequence of its temporal and spatial distribution, being highly seasonal and restricted to patches of riparian monsoon forest. Further work on the life history and larval food plant specialisation is needed to determine the species' ecological requirements.

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